

East Brunswick trainer's book at forefront of national concussion research, policy

By HARRY FREZZA • STAFF WRITER • August 29, 2010

EAST BRUNSWICK — Phil Hossler is once again in the middle of the study of concussions, the athletes who suffer them and when they can safely return.

Hossler, a certified athletic trainer at East Brunswick High School and member of the National Athletic Trainers' Association Hall of Fame, has authored his second book, "Concussion Policy Construction Guide For Schools," published by Lash and Associates Publishing/Training in Youngsville, N.C.

The book is co-authored by Mickey Collins, who's been instrumental in the development of ImPACT, (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing), a computerized concussion evaluation system being used by many high schools, colleges and NFL teams.

An athletic trainer for 37 years — 27 at East Brunswick — Hossler said the book was developed to aid schools in designing concussion policy, to teach athletic staff about signs and symptoms of concussions and to monitor a student-athlete's recovery.

The book is also geared toward improving communication with parents and assisting teachers who work with recovering athletes who may need a lighter class-work load while their brains heal.

"Concussions have been around forever," Hossler said. "We're just now getting good at addressing them."

An estimated 3.8 million concussions related to athletics and recreation were reported nationwide last year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of that number 41 percent of those injured returned to the playing field too soon, according to a study conducted by the Center of Injury Research and Policy at nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

As the school year begins in Central Jersey, information about brain injury is at an all-time high

with the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association implementing its first "concussion and return to play" monitoring guidelines this school year.

In addition, the state legislature is expected this fall to vote on a more stringent return to play policy, the result of a bill drafted by Assemblymen Patrick Diegnan, D-Middlesex. If adopted, the state law would take precedent over the NJSIAA guidelines.

Congress is also in the midst of working on passage of the Concussion Treatment and Care Tools (ConTACT) Act passed. The legislation, developed by U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-NJ, and Todd Platts, R-Pa., would fund computerized preseason baseline and post-concussion neurological testing for school sports and provide national standards and guidelines for schools to follow. The legislation has been referred to the health subcommittee of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

"It's something that both sides of the aisle agree on," said Pascrell, while addressing student-athletes Thursday morning at the Super Essex Conference Sportsmanship Conference.

"Concussions are nearly invisible, but devastating," he said. "They are nothing to play around with."

In New Jersey, Diegnan hopes his Assembly bill, and another for the Senate authored by state Sen. Richard Codey, D-Essex, can be merged and signed into law.

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"It's a top priority, hopefully we can get it done in September," said Diegnan, adding that he's confident a consolidated bill with the Senate can be worked out. "It will be sometime in mid-September when it goes before (the Assembly [education](#)) committee. If we get it right, hopefully, it can be voted on in mid-October and sent to the governor's desk.

"We're basically elevating the concussion awareness to where it needs to be," Diegnan said. "It's not some minor injury that doesn't require attention. This is serious, serious stuff."

Diegnan praised Hossler's efforts.

"I'm tipping my hat to him, (his book is) a model that other schools can follow," he said. "He's been taking the bull by the horns."

In 2006 for his first book Hossler teamed up with Ron Savage, a nationally known brain injury expert, for "Getting A-Head of Concussion." The book was written with the athlete's friends, family and community in mind.

"Everyone in the athlete's neighborhood has a role to fulfill, that encompasses the athletes, the parents and the coach, teachers, school nurse, trainers and even the athlete's best friend," Hossler said.

The second, just-released book is designed for decision-makers, policy writers and school administrators, Hossler said.

"It's a little [visionary](#), but it's really a practical application," Hossler said. "It's not rocket science, but it's a piece nobody else has ever done. The idea of controlling concussion has to be a multi-pronged approach, multiple personalities, multiple mediums to get there. I've tried to create different roles for different personalities and different responsibilities."

An advertising campaign for the 56-page book began Aug. 1 and information about the book has been sent to 6,000 athletic trainers nationwide, said Tonya Hellard, spokeswoman for the publishing company.

The book, which costs \$20, can be purchased online at [lapublishing.com](#).

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East Brunswick Trainer Phil Hossler, left, shows a current football helmet, with adjustable air-cushioning, to Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan at East Brunswick High School on August 24, 2010. (Keith Muccilli / MyCentralJersey)

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